

THE TRUE  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
LIFE and sudden DEATH  
OF OLD  
JOHN OVERS,

THE  
Rich Ferry-Man of *London*,  
SHEWING,  
How he lost his LIFE by his own  
COVETOUSNESS.

AND OF  
His Daughter *MARY*,  
Who caused the Church of *St. Mary Overs* in  
*Southwark* to be built; and of the Building  
of *LONDON* Bridge.

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LONDON:

Printed for T. HARRIS, at the *Looking-Glass* on  
*London-Bridge*; and Sold by C. CORBET, at *Addi-*  
*son's Head* in *Fleetstreet*. 1744.

(Price Six Pence.)

THE TRUE  
HISTORICAL

OF THE  
LIFE AND DEATH

OF  
JAMES O'NEILL

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AND

His Daughter MARY

Who caused the Church of St Mary O'Connell  
to be built; and of the Building  
of London Bridge.

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St. Pauls Church-yard, 1744.  
(Printed by J. Smith)





TO THE  
R E A D E R.

*Courteous* READER,



*HERE I present thee with a true historical Relation of the miserable Life and sudden Death of one whose Name was JOHN OVERS, by Profession a Waterman, and the Ferry-man appointed by Command for the conveying of Passengers and their Commodities from London into Surrey, and from thence to London again; and by this his Labour he got no small Means. Nay, it was almost beyond Thought (being but the Ferry-man) how his Riches came to be so great; and the more he got, the more covetous he still was,*

scarce affording Food to his Stomach, or Apparel to his Back, much more repining when he saw his Servants eat with a good Appetite (for it is well known Watermen have good Stomachs) which beholding them at the Table, he would often say, that they would undo him by their eating so much, for every Dinner cost this Caitiff Threepence. But he still going on in his base Humour, hastened his own Death, as you shall read in the Story, which is worth your Observation, and the Time too you spend in reading it. So I leave it to thy Censure. Farewell.





Amity, the Conclusion of the Mind, the



: sentiments and Vices and Infirmities:

THE

# HISTORY

Old JOHN OVERS, &c.



HAVE read Covetousness thus defined, to be a SIN of the SOUL, whereby a Man desireth to rend from others without Reason, and unjustly to withhold that which rightly belongeth to a Neighbour. It is also sparing and niggardly in giving, but very free and open-handed in receiving, without Conscience or any Regard, whether it be well or ill obtained. It is further said to be the Root of all Evil, from whence, as from a bad Tree, (and as ill planted) proceed the Ruins of Common-weals, the Subversion of Estates, the Wrack of Societies, the Stain of Conscience, the Breach of Amity,



Amity, the Confusion of the Mind, the Stupidity of the Brain, Injustice, Bribery, false Witness, Slaughters, and a thousand several Vices and Enormities : for, *Auri Sacra fames quid non ?* what will the insatiate Thirst of Gold not perpetrate ? And though it be hereditary unto Age, yet in old Men it is most monstrous : for what Thing can appear more foolish, (especially in them that should be most wise) than to be most solicitous and careful for the providing of Meat and Money, when we are nearest to our Journey's end ? But it is an inward Disease, which disperseth itself through all the Arteries and Veins, being rooted even in the Bowels, and being inveterate, is very difficultly to be removed. The Chariot of Covetousness is carryed upon four rotten and corrupted Wheels, Churlishness, faint Courage, Contempt of God, and Forgetfulness of Death ; drawn by two lean hide-bound Jades, call'd Greediness to get, and Holdfast : the Carter that driveth them, is, Desire to have ; and the Whip in his Hand, is called Loath to forego. The  
covetous

covetous Man is good to no Man, and the worst Friend to himself; who is in Want as well of that which he hath, as what he hath not; and in making his last Will, when he is to depart out of the World, he hath more Trouble of Mind, and Distraction in Conscience, studying how to please all, than himself took Delight and Pleasure to possess all: their Nature and Disposition being careful to get, desirous to keep, and unwilling to forego; and therefore saith a learned Father, by Liberality Men's Vices are covered, but by Avarice and Covetousness laid open to the World. Such Men, (as another saith) pass great Travels in gathering Riches, more Danger in keeping them, much Law in defending them, and great Torment of Mind in departing from them. For the griple-minded Man in immoderate Search after Wealth, purchaseth Carefulness for himself, Envy from his Neighbours, a Prey for Thieves, Peril for his Person, Damnation for his Soul, Curses for his Children, and Law for his Heirs; &c. Now on the contrary, a wise Man



[ & ]

preferreth Content before Riches, and a  
clear and unburdened Conscience, before  
all Promotion whatsoever. To covet  
much, is Misery; to live content with  
a Competency, and what is sufficient, is  
earthly Felicity. The Riches that Men  
gather with much Trouble and Travel,  
may fail, Friends may wax false, Hopes  
may deceive, Vain-glory may decay, but  
true Content can never be conquer'd;  
for it is the Blessing of Nature, the Pre-  
servative against the Rigour of Poverty,  
the Master of Sorrow, and the End of  
Misery. Content is a quiet and settled  
Resolution in the Mind, free from Am-  
bition and Envy, aiming no farther than  
at such Things as God in his Mercy  
sends, and we in our Unworthiness en-  
joy. That we live, Nature affordeth;  
that we live contented, Wisdom teach-  
eth; and though it lose much of the  
World, yet it partakes much of God.  
For to live to him, to despise the World,  
to fly Flattery, and Fear no Misery, are  
the true, Endings and Badges of a con-  
tented Mind; for what we have by the  
World, is Misery; what we possess with



Content; is Wisdom: it is the Eye's Quiet, the Thought's Medicine, the Desire's Mithridate; and he alone can be said to be indued with this Virtue, who in Extremes can subdue his own Affections; for to a Mind settled and resolv'd, no Riches are comparable: for it kills Adversity when it assaults, it drys Tears that drop from the Eyes if they flow, it stoppeth Wrath when it urgeth, it winneth Heaven if it continue. Now, notwithstanding what hath before been said against Covetousness, and that for the most part according to the Proverb, *male parva, male dilabuntur*; that Goods ill got, are as evilly spent; and what was most penuriously purchased by the Father, hath commonly been as prodigally and profusely wasted by the Son; yet it holdeth not so in all, as shall be made apparent in the following History. For God is able to extract Light out of Darkness; and what the avaritious Man, either by Extortion or Usury gathers together, to imprison in his Coffers, both from the necessary Use of others, and the Defrauding of his own Back and Belly, yet

can he find a Time to convert them, both to the Good and Benefit of the public Weal, and the Magnifying of his own Glory : and this the subsequent Story will easily make apparent, which was thus.

Before there was any Bridge at all built over the *Thames*, there was only a Ferry, to which divers Boats belonged, to transport all Passengers betwixt *Southwark* and *Church-yard Alley*, that being the High Road-way betwixt *Middlesex* and *Sussex*, and *London*. This Ferry was rented of the City by one *John Overs*, which he enjoyed for many Years together, to his great Profit ; for it is to be imagined, that no small Benefit could arise from the Ferrying over Footmen, Horsemen, all manner of Cattle, all Market-folks that came with Provisions to the City, Strangers and others. This Man, though he kept many Servants, yet was of so covetous a Mind, that he would not, even in his old Age, spare his own weak Body, nor abate any Thing of his unnecessary Labour, only to save Charges; nay more; from his first begining  
of

of Wealth, he still put his Money to Use, which in Time grew to such a mighty Increase, that his Estate was equal to the best Alderman's in *London*; notwithstanding both in his Habit, House-keeping, and all Expences, he expressed nothing so much as miserable Poverty. Now Usury is compared to Fire, which is an active and unsatiable Element; for it eateth and consumeth to Ashes all Fuel and combustible Stuff whatsoever that is laid upon it, and yet the more it devours, the more it desires: And so the Usurer, the more he gaineth, the more he gapeth after, and like Hell itself is never satisfied. And as one very elegantly speaketh of it, it makes the Nobleman to sell his Land, the Lawyer his *Littleton*, the Physician his *Galen*, the Soldier his Sword, the Merchant his Wares, and the World its Peace: It moreover endangereth Reputation, hazardeth a good Name, and blemisheth all other Virtues: It deceiveth the Body, and maketh a Man live careless of his Soul's Safety; for the more Wealth that a Usurer purchaseth by Extortion, the more



doth the Sin of Covetousness corrupt his Conscience, as shall be made more perspicuous in this our *Charon* the Ferryman : Who having but one Daughter, of a beautiful Aspect, and pious Disposition, had Care to see her well and liberally educated, though at the cheapest rate ; and yet so, that when she grew ripe and mature for marriage, he would suffer no Man of what Condition or Quality soever (by his good Will) to have any Sight of her, much less the least Access unto her. But much Water runneth by the Mill, that the Miller never knoweth of. And as the first step to Wisdom is not to love at all ; so the second is to love, as that it be not at all perceived. There must be in every Triangle three Lines ; the first to begin the Figure, the second to augment it, and the third to conclude it : So in Love there are three Virtues ; Affection, which draws the Heart ; Secresy, which encreaseth the Hope ; and Constancy, which finisheth the Work. And farther, most true it is, that the Assaults of Love must be beaten back at the first fight,

fight, or else undoubtedly they will undermine all the second; and so it proved by her. A young Gallant took the advantage of Opportunity, when he was picking up his Penny Fares, to be admitted (by such Means as he used to be admitted) into her Company. The first Interview pleased well, the second better; but the third concluded the Match betwixt them. He that looketh to have clear Water, must dig deep; he that longeth after sweet Musick, must strain Art to the highest; and he that seeketh to compass his Mistress must hazard his utmost Endeavour. I have heard some say, that Love-knots are tied with the Eyes, not to be untied with the Hands; and made so fast with the Thoughts, that they are not to be unloosed with the Fingers; which if it be virtuously grounded, may perhaps reap Disdain, but never shall incurr Disgrace. It is defined to be an unreasonable Excess of Desire, which as it cometh swiftly, so it departeth slowly. Neither is it to be suppress'd by Wisdom, because it is not to be comprehended by Reason: and yet,

yet, as to be free from Love is strange, so to think scorn to be belov'd is monstrous. *Plato* saith, Love is threefold: the first and best is that which only embraceth Virtue; the second is infamous, and that preferreth bodily Pleasure; the third is of the Body and Soul. Than the first there is nothing more generous and noble; than the second there is nothing more sordid and vile; the third is between these two Extremes, the Medium, and that which we may call equal or indifferent. I will end this Discourse of Love in these few Words: It is an Heat full of Coldness, a Pain full of Pleasures, making Thought to have Eyes, and Hearts to have Ears: It is a Sweet full of Bitterness, bred by Desire, nursed by Delight, weaken'd by Jealousy, held by dissembling, and buried by Ingratitude. I leave these two in Love, and so great, that greater scarce can be; but in this way, the Maid aiming only at his seeming Virtues; the other levelling all his Hopes to her future Possessions, in-somuch that it may be imagin'd, that he loved the Means as well as the Maid, and



and the hope of her Fortunes more than the Affection he had to her, or to the Perfection of her Features, as may appear by the Sequel.

In all this Interim, the poor silly old rich Ferry-man, not dreaming of any such Passages as are before spoken of, but thinking all things as secure by Land as he knew they were by Water, continued in his former Course, which was (as near as I can relate unto you) in this manner following.

He was of so poor and wretched a Condition, that he, when he would not be at the Charge of Fire, hath roasted, or at least heated a Black-Pudding in his Bosom, and so eat it; and as you may see, given his Servants some of the Puddings out of his Bosom, which he had heated with rowing over the Water in his Boat. Then Puddings were of a Yard a Penny *London* Measure. Whenever he gave them their Allowance, he did it with grudging, and said, *Here, you hungry Rogues, you will undo me with eating.* He would scarce afford the lighting of a Candle to any poor Neighbour, nor the kind-

kindling of a Fire, lest they had in some Part impoverish'd him, by taking some Light from him. He hath also in the Night gone to scrape upon the Dung-hill, and if he could have found any Bones, but especially Marrow-bones, he would have born them home in his Cap to have made Pottage with them; and instead of Oatmeal, he would have sifted the coarse Meal which he had bought at the Market, and with the Bran thereof he would have made the poor Servants their Broth. He bought his Household-Bread in the Market, not caring how stale or mouldy it was; and when he came home he used to cut it out into Shives or Shivers, that it taking the Air might be the harder to be eaten. His Meat he would not cheapen, unless it were somewhat tainted, and therefore would go farther in the Family; and when his Dog hath refused it, he hath said he hath been a proud Curr, and better fed than taught, and eat it himself. He needed to keep no Cats, for all the Rats and Mice voluntarily left his House, for there were no Fragments nor Crumbs left by

the Servants to feed them. Some have said, that in the Winter Time he hath saved the Droppings of his Nose, and offered to sell them to an Apothecary in the Stead of Snow-water. If I should but speak so much of him, as his Legend reporteth, I should be thought to slander Truth; and therefore I only leave him thus far to the Reader's Consideration, as a most fordid Creature, indebted to his Belly, who had no more of the Nobleness of Man in him, than the meer Shape of Man; whose Care was meerly for himself, and none else; who lived in an Hope, that being dead, he might have carry'd all his Wealth to his Grave with him. It is farther reported of him, (which can scarcely be truly related of any Man, that I have ever read of) that to save one Day's Charges, he first counterfeited himself to be sick, and the next Day to dye, and his Body to be laid out, for no other Purpose, but that he would save one Day's Victuals; apprehending with himself, that whilst his Body was upon the Ground, his Servants would not be so unmannerly or unnatu-



ral, as to taste any manner of Food till  
 they had seen him in the Earth, pur-  
 posing to revive, and recover the next  
 Morning after that Charge was saved;  
 and with this he had acquainted his  
 Daughter, who like an obedient Child,  
 (though far against her own good Na-  
 ture) willing to satisfy his Humour in  
 all Things, gave her Consent, and so he  
 was laid out for dead; and being put  
 into a Sheet only, (for he would not be  
 at the Charges of a Coffin) he was  
 stretcht out in his Chamber, with one  
 Candle set burning at his Head, and  
 another at his Feet, (as the Custom was  
 in those Times) and so the News of his  
 Death was brought unto his Prentices and  
 Servants: Who no sooner heard of the  
 glad Tidings, but hoping now to be rid  
 of their penurious Servitude, (as being  
 almost hunger-starv'd) they came to see  
 the joyful Spectacle, and supposing it to  
 be as it then seemed, they first began to  
 skip and dance about the Corpse; then  
 one ran into the Kitchen, and breaking  
 up the Cup-board Door, brought out  
 the brown Loaf, a second fetcht out the

*Essex*-Cheese, a third drew a black Jack of the Four-Shilling Beer, and so began to eat and drink by no Allowance, filling their hungry Bodies, which before had been a long time miserably pinched, and much weaken'd by reason of the want of sufficient Nourishment; and much rejoicing among themselves, in regard that they were now in expectation of future Help and Comfort, and to be freed (by the supposed Death of their Master) from the hard Usage which they endured; which he hearing and perceiving, lay quaking all this while upon the Ground, to see this Waste, and thinking thereby he should be undone, which was a greater Torment unto him, than ever he suspected the Pains of Hell could be, he could endure it no longer; but stirring and struggling in his Sheet like a Ghost, with a Candle in each Hand, he purposed to rise up and rate 'em for their Sauciness and Boldness, when one of them thinking the Devil was about to rise in his Likeness, being in a great Amaze, catcht hold of the But-End of a broken Oar, which was then



in the Chamber, and being a sturdy Knave, thinking to kill the Devil at the first Blow, struck out his Brains; and so he that only thought to counterfeit Death, was there found dead in earnest; and, as the Story tells us, the Law acquitted the Fellow for the Fact, and he was not only made accessary, but the prime Occasion of his own Death. Now all this Estate falling to the Daughter, it may be presupposed, that the young Gentleman her Sweetheart, hearing the News of her Father's Death (he being then in the Country) would make no small Expedition up to *London*, which indeed he did; but (alas!) with more Haste than good Speed; for in riding Post his Horse most unfortunately stumbling, he broke his Neck upon the High-way; which News being brought unto her, and her Father's Death much grieving her on the other side, it was no small Torment unto her, insomuch that she was almost distracted in her Brain and Senses: but by the Advice of her Friends better recollecting herself, she left the Care of her



her Lover to advise for the Funeral of her Father, who for his Ufury, Extortion, and the Sordidness of his Life (as being a Man excommunicated) was not admitted to have Christian Burial: Yet for Money she so far prevailed with the Fryars of *Bermondsey* Abby in *Southwark*, I mean the Street that bears the Name, the Abbot being then from Home, that they gave him Inhumation: But the Abbot some two Days after coming Home, and not knowing of this Accident, and espying a new Grave, demanded of the Convent who had in his Absence been buried there? of which when they had truly inform'd him, he grew very angry, that for servile Gain they would be won to do such Injury to the Church; and causing the Body to be digged up again, he commanded it to be laid upon his own Ass's Back, (for Prelates and Judges in those Times used to ride upon Asses) then making a Prayer, he turned the Beast with his Burden out at the Abby-gates, desiring of God that he might carry him to some Place where he best deserved to be buried. The

Ass

Als went with a soft solemn Pace, unguided or directed by any quite through *Kent-street*, and so along the Highway, untill he came unto *St. Thomas a Waterings*, which was then the common Execution-place, and then shook him off from his Back when he came just under the Gallows, and there left him; where a Grave was instantly made, and he without any more Ceremony was tumbled in, and covered with Earth; and this was the infamous and remarkable End of his Extortion, Usury, and abominable Avarice. The Impression of these Disasters coming so suddenly one on the Neck of another, besides the Trouble of fresh Suiters hourly importuning her for Marriage, she being of a good and gentle Disposition, and apprehending that all the Pleasures in this World were mere transitory Vanities, and not agreeable to her Desires, she resolved with herself that what her Father had got perditly, to dispend piously; and to that Purpose retired herself into a Cloyster of religious Nuns, which she performed almost as soon purpos'd,

taking



taking present Order, that whatsoever her Father had left unto her by his Death, howsoever gotten, she would dispose as near as she could to the Honour of her Creator, and the Furtherance and Incouragement of his religious Service; and so caused, near to the Place where her Father lived and she was born, the Foundation of a famous Church to be laid, which at her own Charge was finished, and by her Dedicated to the Honour of the blessed Virgin *Mary*: In Memory of which pious Act, and that her Name might live to all Posterity, the People in their Courtesy added her Name also to the Denomination given by her; and call'd it *St. Mary-Overs*, which Title it keeps even to this Day.

I have told you hitherto of the Ferry only; it shall not be held (I hope) impertinent, or much Digression from the Matter, if I speak somewhat concerning the Bridge, (*London-Bridge* I mean) the Foundation, the Building, the Antiquity, and some remarkable Accidents that have happen'd upon the same, which is now my Purpose, and to pass over



them with all Brevity possible, and thus it follows. And to shew that which hath been before related, hath not only Probability, but apparent Testimony of Truth, these be the very Words of *Bartlemew Linsted*, the last Prior of *St. Mary-Overs*: A Ferry (saith he) being kept in the Place where the Bridge is now builded, the Ferry-man and his Wife deceasing, left it to their Daughter a young Maid, whose Name was *Mary*, who with the great Substance left her by her Parents, as also with the daily Profits arising from the said Ferry, built an House of Sisters, in the Place where now standeth the East Part of *St. Mary-Overs* Church, above the Quire, where she was after buried: But in process of Time the House of Sisters being converted into a College of Priests, the Priests builded the Bridge of Timber, &c. The Antiquities whereof be great, but somewhat uncertain.

- We read, that in the Year of Christ 994, *Swamus* King of *Denmark*, besieging the City of *London* both by Land and Water, the Citizens manfully de-

fended themselves, and their King *Ethelred*, so that Part of their Enemies were slain in the Battle, and Part of them drowned in the River of *Thames*, because in their hasty Rage they took no Heed of the Bridge.

In the Year 1016, *Canutus* also the *Dane* came up to *London* with a great Navy, and on the South-side of the *Thames* caused a Trench to be cast, through the which his Ships were towed unto the West side of the Bridge, and then with a deep Trench and strait Siege he compassed the City round.

Out of many I will acquaint you with some few : In the first Year of King *Stephen* a Fire began in the House of one *Alleward* near unto *London-Stone*, which burnt up all Eastward as far as *Aldgate* : the Bridge of Timber over the *Thames* was consumed also ; but afterward not only repaired, but new-made of Timber by one *Peter* of *Cole-Church*, a Priest and Chaplain. And so much for the Wooden Structure.

The Stone-Bridge, about the Year 1176, was begun to be founded by the fore-named *Peter of Cole-Church*, near unto the Bridge of Timber, but somewhat more towards the West. The King assisted the Works (a Cardinal being then Legate here) and *Richard*, Archbishop of *Canterbury*, gave a thousand Pounds towards the Foundation. The Course of the River (for the Time) was turned another way about by a Trench cast for that Purpose, beginning, as is supposed, about *Redriff*, and ending in the West at *Battersey*. This famous and laborious Work, namely, the Arches, the Chapel, and Stone-Bridge on which it was builded, having been three and thirty Years in erecting, was finished in the Year 1209, by the worthy Merchants of *London*, *Serle Mercer*, *William Almaine*, and *Benedict Botewrite*, being the chief Masters of that Work. For *Peter of Cole-Church* deceased four Years before, and was buried in the Chapel on the Bridge in the Year 1205. After the finishing of this Chapel, which



which was the first Building on those Arches, sundry Houses were erected there, till it grew in time to be one of the most glorious Structures in Christendom, much commended by all Strangers and Travellers, as no where to be parallel'd. It consisteth of twenty several Arches (numbering the Draw-bridge amongst the rest) being made of square Stones, rais'd to threescore Foot in Height and thirty Foot in Breadth ; distant the one from the other twenty Foot, compacted and joined together with Vaults and Cellars ; so that in time it appeared rather to be a continual Street than a Bridge : for the fortifying whereof against the violent and incessant Assaults of the River, there be great Revenues, Officers, Overseers, Wardens, and the like, continued even unto this Day.

To the former Discourse, I will only add some few remarkable Accidents that have happened upon it: The first recorded was very lamentable, and much to be commiserated ; which fell upon the tenth of *July* at Night, in the Year

1212. The Borough of *Southwark* being on fire, and Multitudes of People passing upon the Bridge, some to help to quench it, others only to gaze upon it; suddenly the North Part, of *London* Side, by blowing of the South Wind, was also set on fire, so that the People were stopt on both Sides, and hemm'd in with the Flames, insomuch that nothing but instant Death could be expected. There came to rescue them many Barks and Lighters, into which the Multitude so unadvisedly rushed, that they sunk the Vessels, and so perished. It is said, that by the Fire and Shipwrack were lost about 3000 Persons, whose Bodies were found in part, being half burned, besides those that were burnt to Ashes, and who were mist only, but never found.

Besides, about the Year 1282, five Arches of the Bridge, by reason of a violent Frost and great Snow, were forced down, and born quite away.

And

And *Anno* 1381, *Wat Tiler*, with other Rebels of *Kent*, by the Bridge enter'd the City, and took it, &c.

In the Year 1300, upon *St. George's* Day, was a great Justing upon this Bridge, betwixt *David* Earl of *Crauford*, a *Scotchman*, and the Lord *Wells*, an *Englishman*: But then, it seems, it was not so replenished with Houses, as since; and the next Year after, on the thirteenth of *November*, the young Queen *Isabell*, who was at that time but eight Years of Age, was conveyed from *Kennington* besides *Lambeth* through *Southwark* to the Tower of *London*, where she was met with such a Multitude, who came to see her, that upon the Bridge nine Persons were press'd and smother'd to Death; of whom the Prior of *Epter*, a Place in *Essex*, was one; and an antient Matron, that dwelt in *Cornhill*, was another.

In the Year 1450, *Jack Cade*, with other Rebels of *Kent*, by this Bridge enter'd *London*, and striking his Sword on *London-Stone*, proclaimed himself  
Lord



Lord of the City; but by the valiant Citizens they were beaten back, and forced to fly over the same Bridge again.

In the Year 1471, *Thomas* the Bastard *Falconbridge* attempted to fire this Bridge, burnt the Gate thereof, and all the Houses to the Drawbridge, which were in Number thirteen, but was able to proceed no farther.

The like Attempt upon the third of *February* in the Year 1553 was made by *Thomas Wyatt* and his *Kentish Men*, thinking by the Bridge to have made Enterance into the City, but failed in his Purpose.

I conclude with the last Disaster, that some few Years since happened by Fire, whose pitied Ruins still remain a sad Object to all compassionate Eyes.

**F I N I S**